Insights into Violence in the Selected Works of Kamila Shamsie and Tahmima Anam

Synopsis

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"Acts of violence are always a symbol for some greater kind of suffering."

Thomas C. Foster

Humanity has endured several crusades, acts of jihad, political annexations, and other fundamentalist attacks from the beginning of the civilization. Despite the teachings of saints and sages, philosophers and leaders emphasizing the tenets of tolerance, peaceful co-existence, and brotherhood, the nations of the world have witnessed unparalleled episodes of fury, arson, and extremist activism. The two World Wars of the twentieth century caused immeasurable damage to man, material, and soul. Whether it be the trauma of the Partition or the Bangladesh Liberation War, or terrorist attacks, or civil wars, nations around the world have witnessed desolation and destruction brought on by the onslaught of violent attacks. The geographical region under Asia has passed through numerous political upheavals which have deeply marked their scars on the psyche of man. The Partition of India on communal basis on the eve of the country's freedom resulted in one of the bloodiest upheavals in the history of human race. The statistics are staggering. Twelve million people were displaced; a million dead; seventy-five thousand women were abducted and raped; families were displaced, dislocated and thus divided; properties were lost and homes destroyed. The Independence of India also experienced the division of the province of Bengal on religious lines. East Bengal with its Muslim majority went to Pakistan and West Bengal with its Hindu majority was given to the independent India. This left East Bengal then known as East Pakistan 920 miles (1470 km) away from its Western counterpart. The step motherly treatment accorded to the East Pakistan by the politically and economically dominant West Pakistan was mainly responsible for the creation of Bangladesh. Other differences in language, culture, and economy intensified the resentment until in December 1971 Bangladesh was declared an independent nation. With a shattered economy, uncertain political leadership, and the burden of almost 10 million returning refugees, Bangladesh faced extraordinary challenges in its struggle to survive as a nation. Ultimately, it was the common man who endured enormous agony and misery without being a stakeholder in the process.

The term "violence" originates from its Latin root 'violentia', meaning vehemence, which implies an intense force. Etymologically, "violence" is akin to "viotali", and thus is suggestive of damage and destruction that would characterize a violent storm or a traumatic experience. This may be in the form of rape, terrorist attack, or war. In its primary sense, violence denotes injury and also

violations of different kinds adversely affecting the lot and lives of the people. Though the concept of violence has always intrigued philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, and literary writers since ancient times, it is only in the twentieth century that it gained currency in most cultural discourses. It could be owing to the exponential increase or rise in the incidents of violence in the modern complex era, or to the unprecedented carnage the world witnessed in this century. Thus, violence is the overt physical and psychological manifestation of force on individuals, groups, or nations.

Literature is a compendium of the writers' own experiences and the occurrences in the lives of others. These occurrences may be pleasant or unpleasant, real as well as fictional. Literature registers the underlying conflicts in all social relationships. Heinous deeds, like, sexism, economic exploitation, vandalism and religious persecution, are all forms of violence. As the contemporary era is overcast with demonic and sub-human tendencies over each segment and sphere of human life at individual, interpersonal, or mass scales, it is, therefore, essential to identify the motif of violence. So an in-depth study of different human interactions, background history, cultural values, individual differences, etc. has become imperative in this complex modern age.

According to a report of the World Health Organisation on Violence and Health, violence is defined as "the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development, or deprivation." (2002)

It further classifies violence based on the "topology of violence" into three broad categories, namely, self-directed violence, interpersonal violence, and collective violence which are further sub-classified into five types: physical violence, verbal violence, psychological violence, sexual violence, and socio-economic violence.

The consequences of violence have always been devastating. Although, physical hurt is primarily a result of visible violent action yet concealed psychological harm is still its most detrimental effect. Psychological violence is frequently intertwined with national and universal systems of tyranny and injustice. Displacement and dislocation are some of the obvious effects of violence. They cause trauma in people when they are confronted with social, cultural, and psychological difficulties. The members of one group get agitated and suspicious of the other group

as violence between ethnic groups or political factions increases, and the groups often split off from one another and become socially isolated.

According to the psychologists Craig A, Anderson, and Brad J. Bushman, human aggression is defined as "a social interaction or behavior with intent to cause harm to other. The extreme degree of aggression is called violence and human violence is the underlying mechanism of many devastating, large-scale conflicts, as well as smaller acts of homicide." (*Encyclopaedia of Psychology* 2000, p.162) Aggression and social dysfunction are the major causes of violence. Frustration, which is essentially the blockage of activity that is goal-directed, is one of the key psychological elements that affect an individual's propensity for aggression. The Frustration-Aggressive Theory was updated by Leonard Berkowitz, an American psychologist, in 1978, He claimed that "frustration leads to anger and anger can sometimes lead to aggressive behavior."

The victims of violence live in a state of fear and paranoia as a result of having their perceptions of a safe world destroyed, and they run the risk of turning into violent offenders. As violence fosters a mentality of aggression or rebellion against authority, it can weaken the foundation of peace and harmony at all societal levels. Further, it can impair social development, limit or demolish economic growth, and degrade individual and communal security. The communities can fall victim to poverty traps, where widespread brutality and hardship create a vicious cycle.

The worldwide arena for power struggles, rivalries, and conflicts between states and superpowers has traditionally been witnessed in history. The unrest and atrocities have led to the ruination of nations and civilizations along with deleterious impacts on man and material. This study intends to focus on identifying and investigating the forms of violence and its depiction in the selected novels by Kamila Shamsie and Tahmima Anam for introspection by readers.

When such traumatic accidents take place, where the lives of millions of people are unsettled, the writers capture those moments to recast them in their works for posterity. They resolve to end anthropophagy through narratives of suffering. Indian writing in English has produced a plethora of texts based on traumatic and hostile episodes in the history of India and its sub-continents. Plenteous writers such as, Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh, Taslima Nasrin, Khaled Hosseini, Bapsi Sidhwa, and many others, have dedicated their works to the cause. They have portrayed the horrors of the Partition

and how the peaceful life of people was destroyed by these horrific incidents. The present study aims to probe into the representation and classification of violence in the literary works of Kamila Shamsie and Tahmima Anam.

Born in 1973, Kamila Shamsie is a London-based Pakistani author writing in English. Her works range from ancient history to the Partition of India 1947. She is familiar with the impact and intrusion of the British politics in Pakistan and its influence on the common life of people. She wrote her first novel, *In the City by Sea* (1998) while still at the University of Massachusetts where she was studying. It was shortlisted for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in the United Kingdom. She received the Prime Minister's Award for Literature in Pakistan in 1999 for this novel. Her second novel, *Salt and Saffron*, was written in 2000, after which she was selected as one of Orange's 21 Writers for the 21st Century in 2001. Her third novel, *Kartography*, 2004 received widespread critical acclaim and was shortlisted again for the John Llewellyn Rhys Award in the United Kingdom. The other novels of Shamsie include *In the City by Sea* (1998), *Broken Verses* (2005) *Burnt Shadows* (2009), and *Home Fire* (2017).

Kamila Shamsie writes about the past, present, and future of her country through the lives of her characters. She portrays the hues, essence, history, and background of her people and their intervention with other castes and cultures. Unlike other female writers who formerly talk of the disappointing stories, repression, and humiliation of women, Shamsie stands out of the league. Fearless in her approach, she portrays her female characters in the same light. The intrusion of the historical background of countries in the main plot of her novels adds tremendous vitality to her works.

The novel *Kartography* (2001) is set in the violence-ridden city of Karachi, Pakistan. Raheen and her best friend Karim share an idyllic childhood in upper-class Karachi with parents who are best friends. Karim's family migrates to London. As distance and adolescence split them apart, Karim takes refuge in the rationality of maps while Raheen searches for the secret behind her parents' mysterious behaviour. What she uncovers in the novel, takes us two decades back so as to be conversant with the turbulent history of the family as well as the country. The narrative of the novel fluctuates between then and 1971,

during the youth of their parents, who, in their 20s, lived during the uprising racism and consequent violence against Bengalis.

*Burnt Shadows (*2009*),* is a story about a Japanese girl named Hiroko Tanaka and her struggles. The narrative begins with an arresting image of three bird-shaped burns on her back, an indelible reminder of the world she has lost. From there, the story slowly unravels the interwoven stories of the Weiss, Burton, and Ashraf families, spanning across generations. Hiroko, a survivor of the 1945 Nagasaki Bombing, travels to India to meet her late fiancé Konard Weiss and her sister Elizabeth Burton. As the backdrop changes to the summer in Delhi and its blazing *gulmohars*, Hiroko finds a surprising, yet truehearted friend in Elizabeth Burton and a soul-mate in Sajjad Ashraf. Amid the India-Pakistan separation in 1947 and the subsequent violence, Hiroko and Sajjad find themselves married and are forced to settle in Karachi, Pakistan unexpectedly.

Home Fire (2017) is an adaptation of *Antigone*, a 5th-century BC play by Greek writer Sophocles. Shamsie reimagines the events of the tragedy as if they were unfolding among the British Muslims in modern-day London, exploring such themes as the intersection of birthplace and national identity, loyalty to the family versus loyalty to the state, and the crisis of masculinity and its consequences. The story revolves around two sisters and a brother named Parviz, who joins ISIS in Syria and is later killed by a comrade. The British government refuses to repatriate his body. Further, Shamsie also incorporates issues of citizenship and its fragility for certain groups of people. It is a distressing story of an immigrant family facing devastating consequences.

Tahmima Anam (1975-) is a Bangladesh-born British writer, novelist, and columnist. Her first novel, *A Golden Age* (2007), was the Best First Book winner of the 2008 Commonwealth Writers' Prize. Her succeeding novel, *The Good Muslim*, was nominated for the 2011 Man Asian Literary Prize. Her other novels include *The Bones of Grace* (2016) and *The Startup Wife* (2021). Inspired by her parents, she set the background of her novels during the Bangladesh Liberation War. She had also researched the war during her post-graduation career. For the benefit in her research, she stayed in Bangladesh for two years and interviewed hundreds of warfighters, known as Shongram fighters. She

also worked on the set of Tareque and Catherine Masud's critically acclaimed film *Matir Moina* (*The Clay Bird*), which reflects the events during the Liberation War.

The novel *A Golden Age* (2007) revolves around the protagonist Rehana, and her endeavour to survive and keep her children safe during Bangladesh Liberation War. Owing to a financial crisis, her family decides to get her married to Iqbal, who is a businessman and lives in Dhaka. After her marriage, she has two children named Sohil and Maya, and later, her husband dies due to a heart attack. She is compelled to fight for her children as her husband's brother takes the legal custody of her children. With the outbreak of the War, Rehana struggles to comprehend her children's fervent nationalism and discovers her own unique identity besides being just a mother. The novel shows the condition of women in a male-dominated society and the hardships of the people, before and during the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971. During the War, the Pakistani mob (army) enters the city with huge tanks and targets the Dhaka University campus. They resort to the genocide of innocent people on the streets and impose curfews in the cities. The violence against the Bengali people does not end here only rather "the attack on Dhaka was only the beginning" (Anam 84). Maya's best friend, Sharmeen is raped and murdered during this period. Thus, the novel *Golden Age* is a saga of hostility, brutality and arson.

The Good Muslim (2011), chronicles the narratives of the Post-Independence struggle of Bangladesh. The novel is a sequel to her debut novel *A Golden Age* and spans 1984 to 1985, with occasional flashbacks to the aftermath of the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971.The story revolves around the central character Maya, and her consort and friend from Rajshahi, in Bangladesh. She becomes a victim of patriarchy as her husband, suspects her loyalty. She feels daunted by the magnitude of the developments that bear witness to the prevailing conditions. Similarly, Nazia undergoes suffering in assuming the role of a wife and a mother after having been accused of her honesty. The novel narrates the tales of wounded souls of protagonists who try their best to be victorious with honour.

The Bones of Grace (2016) is her third novel and the final part of her Bengal trilogy which depicts the struggle of Zubaida Haque, an adopted daughter of a native Bengali family and finds herself lost between the two worlds- Bangladesh and America. Zubaida marries Rashid by obeying

her foster parents. A situation occurs in Zubaida's life when she develops love for Elijah Strong, who lives in the USA. Moreover, Zubaida belongs to a wealthy Bangladeshi family. Despite being a modern independent woman and Harvard graduate, she cannot oppose or go against her family in choosing her life partner. In the novel, the voice of Zubaida is subdued. She is ridiculed by her in-laws as a bad omen for them. The story also reveals the struggle and survival of her mother against society.

The novels taken for the study assert that violence may erupt due to political, ethnic, and domestic differences. It is interesting to note that the historical turmoil led to the various facets of violence, ranging from religious fanaticism to ethnic and marital violence. The novels of these writers are part of a larger socio-cultural process. They have made an effort to stir the dormant self of humanity by authentically portraying the lives of people ravaged by violent emotions, followed by gruesome acts of violence. The proposed study will examine the relationship between frustration, aggression, and violence in the chronicles of life.

Violence and its aftermath have been studied by psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists and have strongly touched literary writers. The literature review reveals many interesting studies that have been undertaken by the scholars of literature.

Sadia Hasan (2013), has conducted a research on "*Novels of Kamila Shamsie: A Study in Themes and Techniques"* which critically examines the themes and techniques used in her novels.

Zahoor Asma (2021), in her article entitled "*A Critical Discourse Analysis of Interdiscursivity"* explores how Shamsies' discourse in *Burnt Shadows* is interdiscursive in these specific ways. This study shows Shamsies' insightful knowledge of the world history of Colonialism, Post-colonialism and Neo-colonialism and how these apparently different movements are intertwined with one another in more than one way.

Arabati Pratap (2021), in his research article entitled "*A Thematic Study of Tahmima Anam's A Golden Age"*, examines the impact of the Bangladesh Liberation War (1971) on the people of East Pakistan (Bangladesh). It explores how West Pakistan ruled East Pakistan colonially and tyrannically and subjected them to torture and mental anguish.

Ankita Sati (2019) in her journal article entitled, *"Identity in the Bones of Grace: A Postcolonial and Feminist Outlook"* has discussed about the quest for identity and its roots. This paper reveals how women are presented as "others" in society and culture.

Mohammad Miah (2020) in his paper entitled "*A Family Saga of Love, Duty and Identity against the Backdrop of War"* has discussed love and duty as the dominant themes in Tahmima Anam's debut novel *A Golden Age*.

To the best of my knowledge, no study has been undertaken on the topic so far taking the works of these novelists for comparative analysis. This research will significantly contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the forms of violence and its aftermath. It will also examine hostility in its varied forms in different geographical settings through their works. It would broaden the domain of the understanding of human sufferings caused due to socio-political factors, as reflected by these writers in there seminal works.

The objectives of this study will be:

1. To explore and examine the historical and socio-political backgrounds of the countries against which the selected novels are set.
2. To make an in-depth study of the various dimensions of violence vis-a-vis human relations.
3. To investigate the representation of violence in the selected works (novels).
4. To make a comparative analysis of the selected works of the writers chosen for the study.

The chapter division will be as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Trauma of Dislocation in the Selected Novels of Kamila Shamsie

Chapter 3: Voices of the Marginalized in the Selected Novels of Tahmima Anam

Chapter 4: Stylistic Analysis of the Selected Novels of Kamila Shamsie and Tahmima Anam

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Thus, the proposed study aims at analysing the two literary stalwarts arena belonging to Pakistan and Bangladesh though residing in foreign lands. In the study, the concentration would be on making an analysis of the various forms of violence that are depicted by the selected writers. Such a work would not only provide a comprehensive analysis of the causes of violence but it would also

examine its effect on human relations. In this way, the study is an exploration of the socio-cultural dimensions of violence.

"Hindustan had become free. Pakistan had become independent soon after its inception but man was still a slave in both these countries-slave of prejudice-slave of religious fanaticism-slave of barbarity and inhumanity."

Saadat Hasan Manto

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